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GOETHE'S FAUST: A LEITMOTIF IN DREISER'S *THE 'GENIUS'*

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"[W]ho shall cast the first stone? Not evil, but
longing for that which is better, more often directs
the steps of the erring."

Narrative Voice
in *Sister Carrie*¹

"Es irrt der Mensch, solang' er strebt."

The Lord in the
Prologue of *Faust*²

It requires no great leap of the imagination to discern a Faustian component in the aspiration of Dreiser's central characters. Even his most benighted protagonists may be seen as near or far analogues of Faust, particularly in their restless striving, their perpetual discontent, and their insatiable longing for what is beyond them. Also Faustian is Dreiser's recurrent image of the groping individual as an unstable balance of self-love and self-doubt. Like Faust, that individual is driven by inner urgencies, repeatedly disappointed yet irrationally, recurrently hopeful.

Some such image of man is clearly central to all of Dreiser's fiction. What has gone unnoticed, however, is the extent to which that image is elaborated and particularized, in a kind of narrative conceit, not in Dreiser's best work, but in his unwieldy autobiographical novel, *The 'Genius.'* It is in *The 'Genius'* that Dreiser's vision of man in his Faustian aspect

receives its most explicit and elaborate, if not its most effective, expression.

The 'Genius,' to be sure, is hardly on a par with Dreiser's strongest fiction. Critics have long agreed that it is one of Dreiser's more inferior and problematic works.³ The quotation marks around the word "genius," which Dreiser added to the novel's title in revision, are merely the most blatant symptom of Dreiser's lack of control and of his unresolved attitude to his material. Eugene Witla himself is rendered both with devastating irony and with virtual reverence--but with neither the consistency nor detachment that mark Dreiser's finest novels. Despite its problems of characterization as well as structure, however, *The 'Genius'* contains much material which lends itself to productive analysis, both in itself and because of its implications for Dreiser's other work.

In *The 'Genius'* the notion of Faust becomes a steady, significant touchstone to the meaning of the action.⁴ Specific Faust-motifs appear now and again throughout Dreiser's fiction, usually in connection with the notion of man's perpetual restlessness and insatiable desire. In *The 'Genius,'* however, Faustian striving is a recurrent emphasis. It is not a vague or merely intermittent image, but a central, controlling element, rooted in Eugene's character, aspiration and sense of self. It is underscored, moreover, by a host of direct and indirect references to Goethe's *Faust*. Angela, first Eugene's sweetheart and later his wife, is repeatedly seen as Gretchen; Eugene himself is referred to as Faust. Toward the end of the novel Eugene even encounters a Mephisto-figure, complete with a tempting offer Eugene cannot refuse. The Faust-motif, in fact, defines Eugene's meaning more completely than anything else in the novel.

From his early youth, Eugene's vitality, his sense of his own value, his thirst for experience and knowledge combine with his innate talent to prod him along in his striving for "something better." As a provincial boy dabbling in literature, art, newspaper work, he has no conviction about the true direction of his gifts; but every taste of success rekindles his restlessness and impels him to seek new worlds to conquer. Thus he quickly moves from his small hometown to Chicago, from Chicago to New York. It is in New York, still early in the novel, that art emerges as Eugene's central interest. His painting soon becomes his chosen route to beauty and the "ideal," as well as to more worldly joys.

Eugene's energy and passionate aspiration is only one side of his character, however. Like Faust, Eugene is threatened almost from the start by his own impulse to relinquish restless

striving altogether. In *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser's depiction of Hurstwood had provided an image for Dreiser's vision of a life lived without aspiration. In *The 'Genius'*, Dreiser again considers self-indulgent idleness and passivity as a temptation and a threat. Unlike Hurstwood, of course, Eugene in the second half of the novel becomes passive through success rather than failure. Eugene's seduction by the life of luxury, however, is nonetheless a vision of hell. The central dramatic conflict of *The 'Genius'*, in fact, may be seen as the very conflict at the heart of Faust's pact with the devil: the pact that says Faust will be damned as soon as he stops striving, even for a moment.

From quite early in his New York experience Eugene is in danger of being seduced by the more passive aspects of beauty and luxury. There is a side of Eugene which is prepared, almost from the outset, to abandon the ceaseless effort of artistic productivity and to seek some shorter, surer path to the joys of the material world. Book II of *The 'Genius'*, which follows Eugene to the nadir of his fortunes, ends with his restoration not to artistic endeavor and urgent striving, but to social and economic achievement--to the kind of achievement which in fact puts Eugene within sight of greater worldly success than ever before, albeit at the price, in a sense, of his soul.

Eugene shares with Goethe's Faust many qualities of character. Both figures are subject to rapidly fluctuating self-esteem and self-hatred. Like Faust, who vacillates between a proud sense of himself as "Ebenbild der Gottheit" and a contempt for himself as a dwarf or lowly worm,⁵ Eugene sees himself alternately as the most important and most worthless of men. Eugene shares with Faust, moreover, a seemingly inexhaustible appetite for beauty and philosophical understanding, as well as a passionate attachment to life and the world, despite a deep skepticism about the value of life itself. Like Faust, Eugene is to head in many different directions seeking knowledge and understanding as well as satisfaction. If Faust studies philosophy, jurisprudence, medicine, theology and finally magic, Eugene vigorously pursues art and business as well as tentatively exploring literature, astrology and Christian Science.

For Eugene himself of course, the capacity for restless striving is, as for Faust, rather a curse than a blessing. Eugene only experiences as pain the discontent which the novel regards as a source of value and a goad to activity. For Eugene as for Faust, there is little comfort to be found in aspirations which by their very nature can never be fulfilled. Thus Eugene, like Faust, curses fate as well as his own nature,

and seeks to escape into another mode of being.

Eugene's relationship with Angela is a prime example of his effort to escape from the Faustian aspect of his character into the daylight world of more conventional souls. Eugene's various erotic adventures, to be sure, are seen to be part of his search for ideal beauty. His susceptibility to "the lure of 18" (like susceptibility to the lure of "das ewig Weibliche") is regarded as an aspect of meaningful, valuable striving.⁶ Yet it is no accident that the most significant and enduring erotic relationship in Eugene's life is his involvement with the simple, conventional Angela. For *The 'Genius,'* like *Faust*, sets a vision of innocent (and therefore static) bliss against the vision of insatiable longing. Angela's attraction for Eugene--like Gretchen's for Faust--has largely to do with the extent to which she may be seen as the antithesis of many painful dynamic elements in Eugene's unstable existence, and within his very self.

The link between Angela and Gretchen is explicit and repeatedly underscored. When Angela first visits Eugene in Chicago, Eugene is powerfully struck by her simplicity, her shapeliness, the two pretty braids hanging down her back. "She reminded him the least bit of Marguerite in 'Faust.'" ⁷ Eugene has in fact been involved with a "Marguerite" before: his first consummated affair is with Margaret Duff, the Scotch girl who works in a laundry. Margaret Duff initiates Eugene into an appreciation of physical beauty; but at this stage of his life, we are told, "his ideal was as yet not clear to him" (p. 43).

It is of course Angela who most strongly and fully comes to embody that ideal. If her name is not literally Margaret, Angela's actual name nonetheless suggests an ideal, as had the name of Eugene's childhood sweetheart, Stella. Angela is not only implicitly an angel; she is, the text suggests, Elaine of Arthur's Court (p. 87), Lorelei (p. 94), Sappho and Marguerite Gautier (p. 139). Gretchen, however, remains the most significant analogue. The association recurs. "'You are Marguerite and I Faust,'" Eugene tells Angela at one point. "'You are a Dutch Gretchen'" (p. 94). After Eugene and Angela's marriage one of Eugene's friends expresses his desire to make a sketch of Angela. "'You paint her with her hair down in braids, Mr. McHugh,'" Angela's sister says. "'She makes a stunning Gretchen'" (p. 200).

Quite apart from specific references, moreover, Eugene's involvement with Angela, especially in its early stages, is clearly reminiscent of Gretchen and Faust. Angela, like Gretchen, suggests purity, order, contentment. What attracts Eugene to Angela, like Faust to Gretchen, is the fact that this

particular girl in her appearance, her surroundings, her nature and her dreams would seem to be the antithesis of Eugene, as also of Faust--the possible antidote to perpetual struggle, doubt, morbidity, longing and discontent.

When Faust first comes upon Gretchen, it is this spirit of peace and simplicity, of wholeness, which overwhelms him:

Wie atmet rings Gefühl der Stille,
Der Ordnung, der Zufriedenheit!
In dieser Armut welche Fülle!
In diesem Kerker welche Seligkeit! (ll. 2691-4)⁸

Like Faust, Eugene often finds his talent and intelligence a burden; he too longs for the possibility of contentment within a stable, ordered existence. It is in contrast with Eugene's sense of his own duplicity and amorality⁹ that Angela's purity holds for him such powerful charm. "She would make any man an ideal wife," he thinks. "She made him feel the sacredness of love and marriage" (p. 78). Eugene soon dreams of seeking his fortune in New York, then returning to

marry his dream from Blackwood. Already his imaginative mind ran forward to a poetic wedding in a little country church, with Angela standing beside him in white. (p. 92)

Angela's Blackwood home indeed suggests to Eugene at this time the perfect image of how "life should be" (p. 116). It is not surprising that once Eugene removes Angela from her idyllic surroundings and brings her to his New York studio as his wife she immediately loses much of her beauty and charm in his eyes (p. 196). Her value for Eugene is inextricably bound up with a rural idyll, a dream--one could say a fantasy--about the satisfactions of convention, stability, domesticity, order and purity.

For Eugene, as for Faust, order and innocence may be temporarily entertained as an idea, though enduring satisfaction cannot possibly lie there, for Eugene any more than for Faust. Indeed, part of the meaning of both relationships is the real impossibility of fulfillment for either Faust or Eugene within the terms suggested by the existence of a Gretchen or an Angela. Eugene's involvement with Angela indeed represents a temptation away from the life of striving through which alone Eugene is to be "saved."

Life with Angela, however, is only one of many temptations or illusions which Eugene must finally escape. As in *Faust* the issue of "holding the moment" becomes in *The 'Genius'* a consistent and prevalent theme. "Des Menschen Tatigkeit kann

allzuleicht erschlaffen,/ Er liebt sich bald die unbedingte
Ruh" (ll. 340-1)¹⁰ says the Lord in the Prologue of *Faust*.
This is of course the crux of Faust's wager with Mephisto.

Werd' ich beruhigt je mich auf ein Faubett legen,
So sei es gleich um mich getan!
Kannst du mich schmeichelnd je belugen
Dass ich mir selbst gefallen mag,
Kannst du mich mit Genuss betrogen,
Das sei für mich der letzte Tag!

Werd' ich zum Augenblicke sagen:
Verweile doch! du bist so schön!
Dann magst du mich in Fesseln schlagen,
Dann will ich gern zugrunde gehn! (ll. 1692-1702)¹¹

Though Eugene is seen almost from the start of the novel to be torn between an impulse to strive for the "better" and an impulse to indulge himself, it is in the course of Eugene's relationship with Christina Channing that the issue of "holding the moment" first becomes clearly explicit. Idling in the countryside with Christina, Eugene is struck by the occasional "perfection of life" (p. 155). Eugene feels himself during these days suffused with peace and happiness.

'Why may not life be always like this?' he would ask, and then he would answer himself out of his philosophy that it would become deadly after awhile, as does all unchanging beauty. The call of the soul is for motion, not peace. Peace after activity for a little while, then activity again. So must it be. He understood that. (p. 156)

At this stage of life then, while Eugene is capable of experiencing a certain kind of perfect joy or satisfaction, he is aware that even such happiness would fail to satisfy him for long.

Throughout the novel we find Eugene intermittently wishing to prolong certain specific fleeting pleasures, and more particularly railing against the outrageous transiency of youth.¹² But it is not until the end of Book II of *The 'Genius'* that the time approaches when Eugene indeed will unambivalently wish to hold the moment. As Eugene becomes increasingly successful in his job at the United Magazines Corporation, he slowly moves further and further away from his original conviction that "the call of the soul is for motion, not peace." Eugene finds himself full of awe at the luxury and life of ease to which he is increasingly exposed in the company of Colfax and elsewhere. He encounters all kinds of recreation, amusement, luxurious pleasures.

Such a state of social ease was not for him yet, but he could sit at the pleasures, so amply spread, between his hours of work and dream of the time to come when possibly he might do nothing at all. (p. 472)

With a "dream" of idleness and passivity coming to fill his mind, Eugene would seem to have left dissatisfaction and restless striving behind. Significantly it is just at this point that Eugene meets one Mr. Kenyon C. Winfield, a "man of the world,"

...not really a great man, but...so near it that he gave the impression to many of being so. His deep sunken black eyes burned with a peculiar lustre, one might almost have fancied a tint of red in them. His pale, slightly sunken face had some of the characteristics of your polished Mephisto... (p. 475)

It is this gentleman who puts before Eugene the prospect of realizing his dream of passivity. Winfield moots the possibility of Eugene's investing in "a seaside improvement which should be the most perfect place of its kind in the world" (p. 479). The idea of this investment is perhaps the greatest seduction--or temptation--that Eugene is yet to face. The project is to absorb not only all Eugene's capital, but also virtually all his energy, consuming both in the service of a dream of static luxury. The particular details of the dream, moreover, suggest that this portion of *The 'Genius'* is clearly conceived as an echo, if not a parody, of the end of *Faust*, where we find Faust absorbed in the activity of reclaiming land from the sea.

Not only is it Mr. Winfield--"your polished Mephisto"--who puts the tempting proposal before Eugene. The lure of the proposal, quite specifically, is a dream of fulfillment through amplitude and idleness. To use the terms of Faust's original wager, Eugene has in any case been falling in love with "unbedingte Ruh." Now he is tempted to stretch himself out on a "Faulbett," to be seduced by "Genuss," to imagine a life of luxurious ease which he is ready to embrace, saying in effect, "Verweile doch! du bist so schön!" In addition, Eugene, like Faust, is at first unaware of the extent to which the proposal in question involves risk, both material and moral. Finally, and ironically, the specific project proposed by Winfield--like Faust's final enterprise--quite literally involves the reclamation of land from the sea! The area that Winfield proposes to turn into an exclusive recreational retreat begins as a "vast inaccessible swamp" (p. 499), which will have to be dredged. It is described as "an undeveloped tract of land, half swamp, half island, and facing the Atlantic Ocean beyond Gravesend

Bay" (p. 498). The name of the bay has inescapable implications of its own. Eugene's imagination, however, is immediately fired. He "saw it all. It was a vision of empire" (p. 501).

The image of Faust at work reclaiming land from the sea is in itself an image of striving. It is no accident that the one moment Faust seeks to prolong is a moment of untiring activity. In Eugene's case, however, his involvement with land development cannot be seen as benign or redemptive in itself. It coincides, moreover, with another involvement which seems to Eugene full of promise, yet constitutes in fact both a threat and a temptation.

Eugene's relationship with Suzanne Dale develops at the same time as his involvement with Winfield's plan to develop a seaside resort. Indeed Eugene regards Suzanne much as he regards the seaside project. She is a "dream of beauty" with which he can imagine living satisfactorily "forever and ever. He could, he could! Oh, this vision, this dream" (p. 529). The fantasy of changeless perfection, moreover, is elaborated by Suzanne and Eugene's mutually rapturous contemplation of a few lines from Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn." The level of discourse, as all too often among Dreiser's more "sophisticated" characters, is puerile as well as pretentious. But although Eugene's response to Suzanne, and to Keats, is often indistinguishable from, say, Clyde Griffiths' response to the lobby of the Green-Davidson hotel, Dreiser's particular choice of text is significant.

'Bold lover, never never canst thou kiss
Though winning near the goal--yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love and she be fair.' (p. 531)

These lines are relevant to Eugene and Suzanne not merely because their relationship depends upon a shared fantasy of perfection or because it will lack consummation.¹³ The lines take up, in yet another form, the whole issue of holding the moment.

The held moment on the urn of course suggests that stasis, or paralysis, may be the price of perfection, of eternal youth, of ideal beauty. At the same time, however, the urn offers one possible resolution to Eugene's life-long conflict between dissatisfied striving and the wish for peace and contentment. That resolution is art. It is only through his art that Eugene will be able to continue striving while also seeking to hold the moment. Eugene will be restored to this possibility, moreover, only after both his "dream" of Suzanne and his seaside "vision of empire" have been dispelled.

Only after losing Suzanne as well as his wife, his money, his particular job and his present career, is Eugene left to grope his way back to art on the one hand and, partly through his growing child, also back to life.

At this stage of Eugene's experience he emerges for a time very near the point at which we first meet Faust--full of dissatisfaction and despair, particularly with regard to the impossibility of man's learning or knowing anything. At the start of Goethe's drama, Faust complains that all his vast studies have only taught him there is nothing we can know (ll. 354-65). Eugene is similarly plagued by doubt and despair after his loss of Suzanne and the death of Angela. "During a period of nearly three years," we learn,

all the vagaries and alterations which can possibly afflict a groping and morbid mind were his. He went from what might be described as *almost* a belief in Christian Science to almost a belief that a devil ruled the world.... [Finally h]e came to know that he did not know what to believe. (pp. 706-7)

Like Faust, who is half seduced by the beauty of the moon even as he curses the worthlessness of the world (ll. 356-401), Eugene at this juncture "at once loved and detested" (p. 707) the horrible, wonderful panoply of life and the world around him.

On the whole, to be sure, these sections of *The 'Genius'* are hardly among Dreiser's most moving or powerful work. Conceptually, however, the issues are clear. Through art and through little Angela, Eugene at the end of the novel is seen to be restored to an appreciation of vastness, of process, of effort. Dreams of luxury and of perfect beauty had all but robbed him for some time of the capacity to appreciate the "mystery" of life. At the very end of the novel it is again life's variety and baffling complexity which Eugene regards and embraces. "'What a sweet welter life is,'" Eugene thinks to himself in the novel's closing lines:

'--how rich, how tender, how grim, how like a colorful symphony.'

Great art dreams welled up into his soul as he viewed the sparkling deeps of space.

'The sound of the wind--how fine it is tonight,' he thought.

Then he went quietly in and closed the door. (p. 716)

Not only has Eugene's appetite for life and *Tatigkeit* been restored; he is also seen to be once again susceptible to that

beauty which is mystery and flux rather than stasis. Presumably he will now again direct his energy toward an increasing variety of objects; and presumably, despite the mellow mood in which we leave him, he will again find himself many times thwarted, baffled and angry.

"Es irrt der Mensch solange' er strebt," says the Lord in the Prologue of *Faust*. For Dreiser, too, human error is inevitable and inextricably bound up with the impulse to strive. In *The 'Genius'*, partly through his use of the Faust-motif, Dreiser sets out a conception of experience which he embodies with greater dramatic effectiveness in his other work. To be sure, Dreiser's most limited, primitive characters such as Carrie Meeber and Clyde Griffiths are aesthetically and dramatically his most effective ones. It is they--not Eugene Witla or even Frank Cowperwood--who, in their insatiable longing and in their bewilderment, come most fully to epitomize Dreiser's sense of the often baffled and thwarted but equally irrepressible human spirit. Rarely, however, is Dreiser's conception of the human spirit, with its considerable range of mean and brutal as well as nearly sublime impulses, more clearly conceptualized than it is in *The 'Genius.'* It is quite without irony that Eugene Witla conceives of himself as Faust; and the novel's structure and imagery serve to reinforce the comparison. To perceive the role of the Faust-motif in *The 'Genius'* is to focus upon a preoccupation which informs all Dreiser's fiction, and which surely should be recognized for its pervasiveness even if, in itself, it cannot redeem such a problematic novel as *The 'Genius.'*

¹Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), p. 658. All further references to this edition will be included in the text. This quotation comes from Dreiser's revised ending of Chapter L of *Sister Carrie*. It has been part of the standard ending of the novel ever since its publication. The lines do not appear as part of the main text in the new Pennsylvania edition.

²Goethe's *Faust*, ed. Erich Trunz (Hamburg: Christian Wegner Verlag, 1963), I, 317. All further references to this edition will be included in the text. English translations for all quotations will be according to the Walter Kaufmann translation (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961). "Man errs as long as he will strive." All line numbers correspond to the original.

³To my mind, the best critical discussion of *The 'Genius'* in a book-length study of Dreiser's fiction is Donald Pizer's

chapter in *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976). For some other attempts to take *The 'Genius'* seriously as literature see: Walter Blackstock, "The Fall and Rise of Eugene Witla: Dramatic Vision of Artistic Integrity in *The 'Genius'*," *Language Quarterly*, V (1966), pp. 15-18; R.B. Hovey and Ruth S. Ralph, "Dreiser's *The 'Genius'*: Motivation and Structure," *Hartford Studies in Literature*, No. 2 (1970), pp. 169-83; Joseph Katz, "Dummy: *The 'Genius'* by Theodore Dreiser," *Proof*, Vol. I (1971), pp. 330-57; Dorothy Klopff, "Theodore Dreiser's *The 'Genius'*: Much Matter and More Art," *Modern Fiction Studies: Theodore Dreiser Number*, 23 (1977), p. 441-48.

⁴Throughout Dreiser's fiction, the longing and striving of the central character is felt to be a value in itself, quite apart from the particular, often shoddy goals toward which the protagonist directs his or her aspiration. The actual striving of the central protagonist in Dreiser's work is usually regarded as ultimately pointless. Yet the *impulse* to strive--the character's insatiable desire in itself--is presented as valid. Thus Carrie Meeber, with all her limitations of intelligence and sensibility, is seen to represent all the "blind strivings of the human heart" (p. 487). Conversely, Dreiser's portrait of Hurstwood powerfully depicts the horrors of striving abandoned. From Carrie and Hurstwood in Dreiser's first novel, through Clyde Griffiths, with his search for "all the blisses,"* Dreiser recurrently examines man's limitless yearning, his generally misguided choice of objects toward which to aspire, his perpetual dissatisfaction, his continual--one could say his Faustian--striving.

⁵Faust, ll. 613, 653.

⁶I would say the same of Frank Cowperwood's analogous susceptibility in the Cowperwood trilogy. For a different view, cf. Jack E. Wallace, "The Comic Voice in Dreiser's Cowperwood Narrative," *American Literature*, 53 (1981), pp. 69, 70.

⁷Dreiser, *The 'Genius'* (New York: The New American Library, 1967), p. 77. All further references to this edition will be included in the text.

⁸"What sense of calm embraces me,/ Of order and complete content!/ What bounty in this poverty!/ And in this prison, ah, what ravishment!"

⁹See, for example, *The 'Genius'*, p. 347.

* Dreiser, *An American Tragedy* (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1964), p. 29.

¹⁰"...man's activity can easily abate,/ He soon prefers uninterrupted rest."

¹¹If ever I recline, calmed, on a bed of sloth,
You may destroy me then and there.
If ever flattering you should wile me
That in myself I find delight,
If with enjoyment you beguile me,
Then break on me, eternal night!

. . . .

If to the moment I should say:
Abide, you are so fair--
Put me in fetters on that day,
I wish to perish then, I swear.

¹²See *The 'Genius,'* pp. 143, 150-51, 211. Cf. Blackstock, "The Fall and Rise of Eugene Witla," p. 15.

¹³Cf. Klopf, "Theodore Dreiser's *The 'Genius,'*" *passim*.

DREISER NO POKER EXPERT EITHER

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Several readers have recognized Dreiser's ineptness at accurately describing the tennis match between Sondra Finchley and Clyde Griffiths in *An American Tragedy*. For example, Paul Elmer More in 1928 focused on that episode to demonstrate Dreiser's inability to deal with anything above the gutter levels of American life. "In his drawing of characters from the lower strata of life and from the gilded haunts of Broadway," More wrote, "Mr. Dreiser shows an easy competence. . . . But when the author passes to the doings of conventional society, even to the account of a game of tennis, he displays a ludicrous ignorance and awkwardness."¹ Then in 1938 a confused British reader wrote the sports editor of the *New York Times* to inquire about the rules governing tennis in America. His first question involved Sondra's service technique. Dreiser had written, "And now and then, in running to serve him, it was as though she were poised bird-like in flight. . . ."² In England, the writer noted, running while serving constituted a foot fault. The second question concerned the scoring. According to Dreiser, Sondra calls out "twenty love, thirty love, forty love . . . always with a laughing accent on the word love."³ Abroad, the scoring sequence was fifteen, thirty, forty. The *Times* sports editor printed the inquiry under the heading "Dreiser No Tennis Expert" and responded playfully: "There is no difference in the rules or the scoring of tennis here and abroad. Mr. Dreiser must be charged with a double fault."⁴

Tennis, however, is not the only game in Dreiser's fiction to reveal his lack of expertise. A careful reading of Hurstwood's gambling episodes in *Sister Carrie*, particularly in the Pennsylvania Edition, leads to the conclusion that Dreiser was unfamiliar with poker also. These episodes in the novel occur when Hurstwood finds himself unemployed in New York and is tempted to try his luck and skill at the card parlors. He recalls his earlier gambling successes in Chicago, where he frequently won as much as a hundred dollars in friendly games, and thus believes that he still has the ability to make the venture profitable. Unfortunately, after a somewhat promising beginning, he loses heavily, partly because bad luck continues

to plague him, but more importantly, as Dreiser describes the scenes, because Hurstwood turns out to be the most naive and inept of poker players. In fact, no one at the table seems to be aware of the terminology and rules of the game--an impression Dreiser hardly wished to create.

One reason for Dreiser's ineffectiveness in handling these gambling episodes is that he remained uncharacteristically general in his description, and what details he did include were often inaccurate or ambiguous. For example, had Dreiser been a veteran poker player, he would have known that the game breaks into two very different varieties--draw and stud--and that a knowledgeable reader would need this distinction in order to visualize the action and fully appreciate the situation. Such information, however, must be gleaned from some rather sketchy references. At the end of one crucial game, for instance, Hurstwood's hopes are dashed by his opponent's "spreading out his cards," after which the defeated Hurstwood's "hand dropped."⁵ These details suggest draw poker, for had the game been stud, the majority of the cards would have been face up on the table, not held in the players' hands. Also, in the final episode, Hurstwood "tried to open the jackpot."⁶ Only in draw is it necessary to open the pot. The "tried," however, is inappropriate to the situation, for a player either opens or he does not; there is no opportunity to try and fail.

Thus, with some reservations, the reader must assume that Hurstwood is playing draw poker when he receives three of a kind, a combination which will be dealt once in approximately every forty-eight hands.⁷ His opponent, "a pugnacious Irish youth," is holding what he calls "Hearts straight" and Dreiser further defines as "a flush progression of high cards."⁸ Presumably, the youth has a high straight flush, which on the average is dealt once in slightly more than seventy-two thousand hands and can be beaten only by a higher straight flush. In other words, Hurstwood is facing a virtually unbeatable poker hand. Quickly the other players are eliminated, and the betting moves toward its climax.

[Hurstwood] hoped to win much--his hand was excellent. Why not raise five more?

"I raise you three," said the youth.

"Make it five," said Hurstwood, fishing out his chips.

"Come again" [presumably another two-dollar raise], said the youth, pushing out a small pile of reds.

. . . Hurstwood met the raise.

"Five again," said the youth.

Hurstwood's brow was wet. He was deep in now--very

deep for him. Sixty dollars of his good money was up. He was ordinarily no coward, but the thought of losing so much weakened him. Finally he gave way. He would not trust to this fine hand any longer.

"I call," he said.⁹

From this exchange, the reader must assume that five dollars is the betting limit, for surely a player with a near-perfect hand would finally bet the maximum. Also, if Dreiser's terminology is to be trusted, each player has put only seventeen dollars into the pot during this final and usually most intense period of betting; therefore, in order for Hurstwood to have sixty dollars in the pot, there must have been a minimum of nine bets and raises prior to the narrated exchange, and logically more, since neither player always bets the limit--at least fourteen in all. This would be a large number for a stud game, when there are four or five opportunities to bet, but for draw, when there are only two opportunities, fourteen or more bets and raises is an unusually high number. Certainly the "pugnacious Irish youth" should be willing to continue the betting all night, as apparently he is, for Hurstwood recognizes that his bets come with a "persistence" and "sang-froid which, if a bluff, was excellent art."¹⁰ But what about Hurstwood? How can he be credited with any gambling acumen when he allows the betting to continue by raising at least six times on a hand that can be beaten by such relatively common hands as a higher three of a kind, a straight, a flush and a full house, not to mention four of a kind and straight flushes? Three of a kind is a good hand in draw poker but also one that requires great caution in the face of strong and persistent opposition. Ultimately, if a reader acquainted with poker reflects on this episode, he must assume that Hurstwood is an incredible "mark" or Dreiser was extremely naive about the subject.

As suggested above, most evidence leads to the latter conclusion. For example, in narrating the betting exchange quoted above, Dreiser was seemingly not aware that a player can continue to raise only if another player has raised. When there is no counter-raise, that betting sequence has ended. In the exchange quoted, Hurstwood raises five dollars, and the youth raises back three; Hurstwood then ups the pot two, and the youth responds, "Come again," presumably another two dollars. At that point, after buying some chips, Hurstwood meets the raise. If he meets the raise but does not raise back, the betting should end, but it does not. The youth cynically smiles and says, "Five again," taking what seems an illegal raise. It is only then that Hurstwood gives way and replies, "I call," as if Dreiser assumed that those words rather than Hurstwood's earlier failure to raise concluded the

game.

Upon being called, the youth incorrectly and ambiguously identifies his hand as a "Hearts straight," by which, as noted above, Dreiser must have meant a straight flush. Since the hand contains "a flush progression of high cards," the proper call would have been something like "straight flush, jack high," for the specific suit is unimportant in poker. What determines the value of the hand in competition with other straight flushes is the high card in the straight.

Clearly identified or not, this hand finishes Hurstwood for the evening, but a few days later, he begins to replay the game in his mind: "'I didn't do that thing right the other day,' he thought, referring back to his loss of sixty dollars. 'I shouldn't have weakened. I could have bluffed that fellow down. I wasn't in form, that's what ailed me.'"11 To assume that he should have stayed in the game longer or that by raising two and five dollars he could have bluffed someone with a straight flush out of the pot goes beyond naivete to border on dementia. Nevertheless, determined to play more aggressively, Hurstwood searches out a more high-class poker room, one with a ten-dollar limit. For a time his bluffing tactic succeeds, but finally he opens the pot with a "moderate hand" and is opposed, ironically, by three of a kind. During the betting, Hurstwood makes a magnificent show of strength--aided by Dreiser's erroneous belief that a player can raise repeatedly without a counter-raise from the opposition. "I raise you ten," begins Hurstwood; "Good," replies the gentleman with three of a kind, making no raise himself but showing no sign of weakening. "Ten more," says Hurstwood; "Good," echoes his opponent, again making no raise. "Ten again," repeats Hurstwood; "Right you are" is the rejoinder. Ultimately, Hurstwood makes at least seven uncountered raises before his opponent yields and says, "I call."12 The reader is never told how "moderate" Hurstwood's hand is, only that it can not beat three of a kind. Thus, Hurstwood loses seventy-five dollars and thereby worsens an already desperate financial situation; however, the impact of the loss is undercut by the sheer mindlessness of his play and by Dreiser's obvious unfamiliarity with the game he is narrating.

When Dreiser, with the aid of his wife and Arthur Henry, revised the manuscript, most errors in the poker episodes were allowed to stand. The only revision was to replace the "Hearts straight" with the somewhat more common full house. Perhaps someone recognized the confusion in identifying the hand, or perhaps it was determined that having Hurstwood beaten by such an extremely rare and powerful hand robbed the scene of some credibility. Whatever the reason, the change

does remove the most glaring evidence of Dreiser's lack of poker expertise and make Hurstwood's assumption that he could have bluffed the "Irish youth" slightly less outrageous, but only slightly. Nevertheless, enough errors remain to distract and perhaps amuse any reader familiar with the game of poker.

In *Dawn*, Dreiser noted that when he was a teenager in Warsaw, Indiana, several of his friends played cards in the County Clerk's office or the back room of Morris's bookstore, but he was reluctant to enter the game. "I invariably found some way of avoiding final participation," he wrote, "lack of means and daring warning me against unhappy denouements of any kind."¹³ *Sister Carrie* reveals that this innocence of card games persisted well into his adult life.

¹Paul Elmer More, *The Demon of the Absolute* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1928), pp. 67-68.

²Theodore Dreiser, *An American Tragedy* (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 445.

³*Ibid.*

⁴Guy H. Nicholson, "Dreiser No Tennis Expert," *New York Times*, 6 August 1938, p. 9.

⁵Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, eds. John C. Berkey, Alice M. Winters, James L. W. West III, and Neda Westlake (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), p. 370. The reference to "spreading" the cards occurs only in revision. See *Sister Carrie* (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 336.

⁶Pennsylvania Edition of *Sister Carrie*, p. 374.

⁷Hubert Phillips, *The Popular Book of Card Games* (London: H. F. & G. Witherby Ltd., 1972), p. 254. All statistics on poker probabilities are taken from this source.

⁸Pennsylvania Edition of *Sister Carrie*, p. 370.

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 369-70.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 369.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 374.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 375.

¹³Dreiser, *Dawn* (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1931), p. 246.

LATE TRIBUTE TO DREISER IN GERMANY

On 18 March 1984, the City of Mayen dedicated the City Library to Theodore Dreiser. The building, forming part of the old town fortification, is a fine example of medieval craftsmanship. It was completely restored from 1966 to 1977 and decreed a historical monument in 1982. The "Haus am Obertor" became the new location of the City Library. The City Council then decided to name it "Theodore-Dreiser-Haus" in honor of the famous son of the Mayen emigrant Johann Paul Dreiser. As the Mayor pointed out, a library building seemed to be the ideal memorial for a writer. The official dedication on the morning of March 18 was attended by many persons, among them the Cultural Attache of the American Embassy, Edwin P. Kennedy Jr., a representative of the government of the Rhineland-Palatinate, representatives of the City Council of Mayen, and several members of the Dreiser family. Speeches of the Second Mayor, Hans Seichter, for First Mayor Albert Nell, and the Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, Prof. Dr. Konrad Mohr, a lecture by Prof. Dr. Hans Galinsky, "From Emigrant's Son to American Author: Theodore Dreiser's Course of Life," and readings from Dreiser's works by high school students were the highlights of the celebration, which ended with the unveiling of a commemorative plaque on the building, showing Dreiser's bust and bearing the inscription: "Theodore Dreiser 1871-1945. American writer whose father emigrated from Mayen to the United States of America in the middle of the last century."

---Renate von Bardeleben

RELATIVES OF THEODORE DREISER ATTENDING THE DEDICATION



Left to right: Rolf Dreiser, Marithere Singer, Gisela Dreiser, Freda Olson, Wilhelmus Hilger, Hannelore Dreiser, Johann Schaefer, Heinz Theo Dreiser, Anita Marquardt, Ruth Lukei, and Rolf Dreiser.

DR. NEDA WESTLAKE RETIRES

Dr. Neda Westlake has retired this year as Curator of the Rare Book Collection at the University of Pennsylvania. In that capacity since 1960, and before that as Assistant Curator from 1949, she has served and guided students of Dreiser for over thirty-five years, and has herself made valuable contributions to the field. Her association with the special collections began when, as a graduate student in American Civilization, her advisor, Professor Robert Spiller, suggested she take a library service scholarship. She went to see her predecessor, John Alden, whose small office was cluttered with the newly arrived cartons labeled "Seagram's Seven", "Four Roses", and "Black and White" which contained the correspondence and manuscripts that had arrived from Dreiser's home in Hollywood. Reaching into one of the boxes of letters to Dreiser, Alden handed her a letter and asked her to read the signature. "Fannie Hurst" she replied promptly, and he hired her on the spot. As nearly two generations of Dreiser scholars can attest, answering questions about the contents of those boxes became a life-long habit.

Dr. Westlake has done much more than answer questions. She has served ably as an administrator of the Dreiser papers and as a scholar in her own right. Her contributions to Dreiser studies--as well as to studies of his contemporaries, like James T. Farrell, Van Wyck Brooks, Lewis Mumford, Waldo Frank, and H.L. Mencken--include numerous articles, and the general editorship of the *Pennsylvania Sister Carrie* (1981), the *American Diaries* (1982), and *An Amateur Laborer* (1983). Anyone who has worked with Dr. Westlake on these or other projects knows what Robert H. Elias meant when he said, at the beginning of his three volume *Letters of Theodore Dreiser* (1959), "The completion of the present work would have been unimaginable without her."

In a recent interview, Dr. Westlake had this to say about her years among the Dreiser papers:

Although I never met Theodore Dreiser, I feel that after so many years, we are well-acquainted. Struggles with his sometimes difficult handwriting, finding that he has shaken my confidence in the spelling of words with "i" and "e"s, and the exasperation of not being able to find a particular letter that I know I have seen in the laby-

rinth of the collection, have all been part of the getting-acquainted process. In these years, I have been particularly fortunate in becoming friends with many who knew Dreiser intimately. Many conversations with Louise Campbell, his long-time editorial assistant, William Lengel, his friend and editor, Waldo Frank, James T. Farrell, Vera Dreiser, his neice, and many others have sharpened my sense of the complex character of this man whose manuscripts, many still unpublished, and his diverse and illuminating correspondence have been a constant source of consuming interest to me....And equally rewarding in terms of friendship and further glimpses into Dreiser's personality have been my contacts with so many people who have come to Penn to do research in the Dreiser Collection.

Those many people will remember Dr. Westlake's energy, her good humor, and her generous willingness to aid them in projects, large and small. Those of us who have come to rely on her knowledge and good judgment will feel the loss. We wish her a much deserved rest--and good fortune in the years ahead.

Thomas P. Riggio
University of Connecticut

REVIEWS

DREISER CRITICISM IN INDIA

Theodore Dreiser: The Man and His Message, ed. L. Jeganatha Raja: Annamalainagar, India, 1984, iii & 115 pp.

This collection of essays includes six that appeared in the January, 1984 issue of *Life, Art and Literature* and three previously unpublished pieces. In addition, Raja has provided a short introduction focused on Dreiser's social protest of the thirties, though the volume ranges beyond that particular phase of the novelist's life and work. Ironically, Raja recommends Dreiser to his Indian audience as an appropriate palliative to what he sees as his country's deep rooted materialism. Dreiser, of course, used India in *The Stoic* as a spiritual contrast to grasping America.

Raja's collection includes contributions from some familiar names such as Phillip Gerber, R.N. Mookerjee, Yohinobu Hakutani, Richard Dowell, and Dreiser's niece Vera. Gerber's essay "Dreiser: The Great Sloth of the Thirties" explains why the years of the Great Depression were not the anti-capitalistic novelist's "personal millenium." In "The Voice of Melancholy: The Poetry of Theodore Dreiser," Mookerjee shows how the poems chart a discernable course toward the "spiritual and religious interpretation of the Creative Force" evident in the last years. Hakutani's essay "Dreiser and the American 1890s" points out that the young, developing writer was neutral in the battle then raging between realism and romanticism. Dowell's "Dreiser and the Mills Hotel" reveals how the writer transformed a relatively pleasant stay in a New York hotel into a study of America's economic failure when he recast the experience for *The Color of A Great City*. Vera Dreiser's "Reflection" is a quibble with some of the "unsound" criticism of her uncle's life and works.

Raja has contributed an essay of his own to the collection. "Dreiser's Philosophy of Life" emphasizes the male characters and their role in projecting a naturalistic message.

Donald H. Goodyear writes in "Theodore Dreiser: Novelist of the City" about the influence of Darwin, Marx, and Freud on the determinism of the fiction. P. Marudanayagam entitles his piece "Clarissa in America." It argues for the tragic dimension of *Sister Carrie*, mostly against the belittling criticism of Leslie Fiedler. "Dreiser's Four Early Stories: A Critical Study" by Brij Mohan Singh reasons from *McEwen of the Shining Slave Makers*, *Old Rogaum and His Theresa*, *When the Old Century Was New*, and *Nigger Jeff* that the short fiction is essential for an understanding of the novels and that these particular stories represent high artistic achievement in themselves.

Raja's collection is a service to Indian critics, scholars, and readers. His American audience will also find both important facts and insights within its covers. Copies of the book are available from Dr. L.J. Raja, 4022 Spruce Street, Apt. #2 RR, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104. The price is eight dollars.

Lawrence Hussman

DREISER NEWS & NOTES

In addition to his article on Neda Westlake's retirement, Tom Riggio reports that Neda has kindly consented to receive mail directed to the library. Specific inquiries concerning the Dreiser papers, however, should now be directed to Daniel Traister, Curator, Special Collections, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 19104. . . . Beginning with the Spring 1986 issue, the *DW* will begin using the textual citation method recommended by the Modern Language Association in 1984. We request that all manuscripts conform to that method of documentation. . . . J. Robert Constantine, Indiana State University, who is editing the letters of Eugene V. Debs, sends the following information from a correspondent in China: "Eugene V. Debs was little known to us Chinese. We know of the Democratic and Republican Party, but few are aware of the Socialist Party. Perhaps this Party has ceased to exist now. Theodore Dreiser enjoys much greater popularity here owing to his masterpieces, for example, *Jennie Gerhardt*, *The 'Genius'* and *Sister Carrie*." Seemingly the Terre Haute connection of Debs and Dreiser spurred this comparison.